



2d Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment

The Government Support Team in Fallujah

by Captain Gregory Mitchell and Captain Christopher Haggard

Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, the city of Fallujah, and Iraq as a whole, relied entirely on the directives from the Baath party and the political and personal goals of Saddam Hussein for political and administrative guidance. Baath political directives were the only source of authority, which maintained stability and peace in a town of smugglers, religious zealots, and tribal strife. When the regime fell, the city of Fallujah entered a lawless period when, without Saddam and the former party apparatus, the people of Fallujah fell back on the traditional sheikhs and Islamic clerics (Imams) for their leadership.

In the absence of the Baath Party, the tribal sheikhs and Islamic clerics presented themselves to the coalition and the community as the legitimate voices of political authority in the city. Their post-war ascendance in Fallujah has been a mixed bag for coalition authorities. In addition to serving their community, the Imams and the sheikhs have also exploited this lawlessness to increase their authority and wealth in the city. Coalition forces were

forced to form a tenuous partnership with tribal leaders and Muslim clerics whose leadership is inherently undemocratic. Their power lies in ancient family relationships and medieval religious laws that make democratic change difficult. Unlike Baghdad, Fallujah does not have a strong professional class, therefore tribal and Islamic religious leaders will continue to dominate city politics in the near and long term. The Iraqi political landscape will challenge the efforts of commanders to establish safe and secure environments.

During the 2d Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's (2/3 ACR) tenure in Fallujah, the unit's government support team (GST) was the coalition's primary political liaison with local Iraqi authorities in Fallujah. The mission of the GST was twofold: to prepare the city of Fallujah for a democratic form of civil government and improve cooperation between U.S. forces and the local population. The GST in Fallujah was initially established and led by Captain John Ives of 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, during that unit's occupation of the city from 9 June

through 26 July 2003. In mid July, Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) members attempted a meeting with Fallujah's mayor, Taha Bedawi, to discuss establishing a CPA office in Fallujah. When the CPA delegation arrived, they were greeted with a mortar attack on the mayor's compound, orchestrated by Taha Bedawi's city manager and right-hand man, Mr. Ziad. Ziad had left the building as the delegation entered and probably signaled the attackers with his satellite phone. Ziad was arrested and is currently in coalition custody. The only casualty of the attack was CPA's willingness to open an office in Fallujah, which would have paved the way for millions of relief project dollars and civilian civil engineering expertise above and beyond what U.S. Army civil affairs can provide. Because Fallujah remained an unpermissive environment, the city's relationship with the coalition would continue to be brokered through the GST office for which 2/3 ACR assumed responsibility on 26 July.

The 2/3 ACR's GST staff was comprised of an armor captain, a field artillery first



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lieutenant to staff the political liaison and claims office, and a team of engineer officers and noncommissioned officers from 489th Engineers, South Carolina National Guard, to man the engineer office. Reconstruction projects were proposed to the engineer office, which worked with an Iraqi engineer committee from the local community and U.S. Army civil affairs assets attached to the squadron. The political team had a separate twofold mission: identify legitimate political and religious leaders in the community who warrant an audience with the squadron commander, as well as political and religious figures opposed to coalition efforts, to establish a safe and secure environment in the city. This was accomplished in the GST office through a series of meetings with local tribal, political, and religious personalities. All meetings were conducted within the relative security of the mayor's cell compound, and at 2/3 ACR's compound for the Mujehadeen Al Khalaq based on the eastern edge of the city.

Through civil engagement, the GST identified 11 tribes, 22 major tribal leaders, and 11 approximate tribal geographical boundaries. The squadron commander effectively leveraged influence in these tribal areas by personally reviewing engineering projects and approving or disapproving them based on the security situation in the different regions. The GST was the vehicle for this leverage and the platform for the commander's dialogue

with sheikhs regarding security in the city and outlying rural areas where tribal influences are strongest.

Identifying tribal leaders and the geographic boundaries of their influence in the area of operations allowed the squadron commander to hold the local sheikhs accountable for anti-coalition violence in their tribal areas. The commander approved or denied engineer projects based on a sheikh's willingness to accept responsibility for the tribe's actions. On several occasions, sheikhs came forward to offer intelligence on criminal and terrorist activities of certain members of their tribe or other community members. To exploit this intelligence, the GST worked closely with one of the squadron's attached tactical human intelligence teams (THT). Tribal leaders and other prominent members of the community would come forward to the GST team leader and the team leader would conduct a handoff to the THT. The importance of the GST's role in improving the commander's relationship with local leaders cannot be overstated. Through the GST, the squadron commander developed valuable personal relationships with local leaders, which had an enormously positive impact on 2/3 ACR conducting operations in the area of operations.

Sorting through hundreds of tribal and religious figures, who all claim to represent thousands of followers, became a pri-

mary goal of the GST in Fallujah. When 2/3 ACR relieved the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, a sheikh council was established to assist coalition forces and the mayor in stabilizing and reconstructing a badly neglected city infrastructure. This sheikh council chose Taha Bedawi to lead the city through its reconstruction period. We discovered that after several weeks of dealing with Mayor Taha and his council of sheikhs, there was a second council of 15 major tribal leaders, who did not participate in the mayoral election and held equal, if not greater, political influence in the streets of Fallujah. Passive information collected from daily engagement patrols conducted by an attached tactical psychological operations team from the 361st Psychological Operations Company, confirmed general discontent with Taha's mayoral regime and his camp of sheikhs. The opposing sheikhs claimed that the mayor and his supporting sheikhs embezzled coalition reconstruction project funds. One of the regiment's THT teams concurred with sources among the opposing sheikhs that the mayor's team of civil engineers and contractors were embezzling much of the money supplied by the coalition for reconstructing city schools and infrastructure. Contracts were also disproportionately awarded to contractors from two of the seven major tribes of the Fallujah area.

At times, the GST had to directly manage certain activities of the mayor's office and its control of the city. The arrest of Mr. Ziad left the second most important position in the city's government vacant. Ziad had acted as an executive officer for the mayor and his absence caused a major backlog of unfinished business, everything from hiring and paying facility protection service officers guarding important infrastructure in the city to monitoring departments within the public works office. The city's sewage and water infrastructure was in disrepair and little was being done to address the problem. With the squadron and regimental commanders' approval, the GST recommended Mr. Ra'ad, a close ally of the coalition's efforts, for the position. Ra'ad was a competent administrator who had the backing of several powerful sheikhs. He was also opposed to the corruption that plagued the mayor and his staff. Most of the mayor's staff were part of his extended family and all benefited from the black-market sale of diesel and gasoline in the city. The mayor was also guilty of misappropriating funds paid by the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, which were earmarked for project funds. Through Mr. Ra'ad's appointment, the coalition had

the means to ensure a greater degree of accountability within the mayor's office and city administration.

The GST makes efforts to identify political parties and educate individuals who do not entirely rely on their tribal affiliation for personal status. One of the GST's last acts prior to relief in place with the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, was coalition recognition of a group in Fallujah, the *al Mujtema al Medeny* or "civil society," which is run by local lawyers, teachers, doctors, and political bosses. A democratic future in Iraq will depend on widening the franchise of educated men and women whose identity and self worth is based on more than their tribal and religious affiliations.

Public Relations

In addition to assessing and affecting the political conditions in Fallujah, the GST directly engaged the local population through its public relations (PR) office. The PR office had three tasks: to accept, investigate, and forward claims to the regimental judge advocate general's (JAG's) office for compensation from U.S. forces in accordance with the Foreign Claims Act (FCA); to identify and locate detained Iraqi family members; and to return vehicles that were seized from thieves or improperly seized to their rightful owners. These tasks were complex and at times very difficult to accomplish; however, the attempt, even if unsuccessful, proved very valuable in winning local support for coalition forces in and around Fallujah. The PR section of the GST demonstrated to the Iraqi public respect for private property and unit commanders accepting accountability for their soldiers' actions, a character trait noticeably absent in Saddam's Iraq.

The 2/3 ACR GST forwarded claims, ranging from minor property damage to death, to the JAG office. With the assistance of locally hired interpreters, the claimant told the story of how they or a family member were injured or their property was damaged or destroyed by U.S. forces. The requirements for personal injury claims and property damage claims were similar. Personal injury claims required a narrative of how the person came to be injured, the medical care rendered, and witness statements from both U.S. forces and Iraqis involved. Property damage claims required more detailed documentation from the claimant. To file a claim for property damage, the claimant provides a narrative of the incident, photographs of the damage, estimates to repair the damage or replace the property,

and witness statements from U.S. forces and involved Iraqis.

To determine the validity of the claims, the provisions of the FCA were applied. According to the FCA, foreign nationals may make claims for compensation against the U.S. Government for death, injury, or property damage suffered during noncombat operations, or due to negligent or wrongful acts of U.S. Armed Forces personnel. By strictly applying the FCA to the claims collected, only eight claims out of 56 collected were approved for payment. All eight of those claims were for property damage. Eleven claims were filed for death or injury and the regiment did not approve any of the claims for payment. The commander of the 2d Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 3d Infantry Division authorized using the commander's discretionary funds for making *solicia* payments for death and injury. Payments of \$500 and \$1,500 were made to Iraqis for injuries and death, respectively. The citizens of Fallujah and the surrounding countryside were very receptive to these payments and the 2d Brigade contended they became more supportive of coalition efforts. These *solicia* payments to Iraqi families were based on an ancient Iraqi tribal tradition of paying blood money (Ta'aweeth) to end a tribal feud. Ta'aweeth worked to end revenge and reprisal attacks on U.S. forces. The 2/3 ACR was unable to continue

the *solicia* payments that 2d BCT, 3d Infantry Division began due to legal and financial constraints.

Establishing the Foreign Claims Commission (FCC) in Iraq augmented the coalition's efforts to build a safe and secure environment. However, its effects were limited by the regiment's strict interpretation of the law. The following example illustrates the limits of the FCC:

On 25 August 2003, a patrol being conducted by 2/3 ACR on Highway 10 near the town of Habbinyah was ambushed with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and small-arms fire. A supporting unit reinforced the patrol by launching the quick reaction force (QRF), comprised of two M1A2 Abrams tanks. Arriving on scene, the reinforcing unit's section engaged enemy dismounts with suppressive fire to cover the evacuation of the wounded. During the suppression of enemy fire, an Iraqi civilian approached the ambush site in his personal vehicle. During the Iraqi's attempt to turn around and leave the scene, the QRF tank section fired on him. The Iraqi's car was completely destroyed. The next day, the Iraqi, who was uninjured, arrived at the GST's PR section to file a claim for the loss of his car. The Iraqi had all the required documents with the exception of statements from the U.S. forces involved. The Iraqi said he was un-



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armed, in the car alone, and in the area to pick up his brother for a trip to Baghdad. The U.S. soldiers involved stated they thought the car was part of the attack. The claim was eventually denied because U.S. forces were reacting to an ambush in self-defense.

This example is just one of many difficulties in operating in an urban environment against an enemy force that does not wear uniforms or use military vehicles or traditional tactics. This makes identifying combatants very difficult. The QRF had engaged enemy forces hidden in a field when a civilian car approached along a heavily traveled highway. The occupant of the car attempted to leave the area, was unarmed, and did not threaten U.S. forces. In this case, the Iraqi clearly was not a combatant, but because his car was destroyed during a combat operation, the FCA did not allow compensation for the loss. In this one instance, U.S. forces lost the support of an Iraqi national who may have previously supported the coalition.

To resolve this apparent conflict between western laws and eastern customs, a training program should be instituted that allows both commanders and soldiers to know how their enemies and possible allies think. U.S. forces have already begun this process by respecting a few Iraqi customs, such as having female soldiers search female Iraqis and showing proper respect to identified local leaders. Coalition forces may benefit from a deliberate study of traditional tribal conflict resolution, including the payment of blood money (Ta'aweeth) for the loss of innocent life.

Detained Persons

The second facet of the PR section was to assist Iraqis in locating family mem-

bers who were detained by U.S. forces. This seemed like a fairly easy and straightforward task; however, it proved to be extremely difficult. The root issue of finding detainees was properly identifying persons we were trying to locate. Identifying an Iraqi by name proved difficult due to the number and order of the names a specific Iraqi national uses, as well as how the names are spelled. Using transliteration to convert Arabic phonetics into English proved difficult to standardize. A standard Arabic transliteration system exists and is used by academics and linguists. The U.S. Army should adopt this system in the Iraqi theater to limit confusion in the detainee process. To complicate matters, Iraqis use up to five names to identify themselves. Identifying a person by name is difficult even if it is spelled properly. The first name is the person's given name, the second name is the father's name, and the third name is the grandfather's name. Iraqis sometimes use a fourth name, often their great-grandfather's name, and a fifth name often identifies a person's tribal affiliation. One individual could identify himself with any combination of these names.

Identifying an Iraqi by a prisoner of war (POW) capture tag number was also difficult. The military police (MP) units were very good at processing the proper documentation (POW capture tags) for each detained person. Other units were not thoroughly trained to properly process capture tags, and developed unique alphanumeric identification systems that were confusing to other units. This numbering system was further confused when identification numbers were changed or reassigned at higher echelons without notification to subordinate units. V Corps' provost marshal's office attempted to consolidate a theater-wide detainee list in a

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spreadsheet format. However, this list contained over 5,000 names and was extremely cumbersome to use due to non-standard spelling, nonstandard tracking numbers, and the number of names for each person listed.

In the future, all units deploying to a theater of operation should receive training on detaining, processing, and holding foreign nationals. A standard should be developed by the theater command and strictly adhered to by all subordinate units. This standard should include training on using POW capture tags, prescribed methods of recording and reporting detainee information to higher units, and disseminating consolidated detainee rosters to subordinate units. With strict use of POW capture tags and standards for spelling and listing the five names for each individual, the consolidated detainee list could have been a powerful tool to locate detained Iraqi family members.

Returning Seized Vehicles

The third and final facet of the GST's PR section was to identify and return seized vehicles to their rightful owners. There were two main reasons seized vehicles were returned: vehicles seized when owners were detained and subsequently released, and vehicles seized from wrongful owners at traffic control points or during raids. Identifying the proper owner of a vehicle was very easily accomplished. Vehicles in Iraq have vehicle identification numbers and chassis numbers that are printed on registration cards that the owners must present to prove ownership. Once ownership was established, the owners gathered outside the main gate to the squadron's compound once a week. The PR section would then escort the owners on to the compound to claim their vehicles.

On occasion, it was difficult to find vehicles. Units were authorized to use non-tactical vehicles (civilian vehicles) for mission essential tasks. Because units misunderstood the intent of this authorization, some units would keep these vehicles and take them to other areas of operation following a relief in place. For ex-

ample, unit blue would seize a vehicle in Fallujah and then take it to Tikrit after unit green relieved unit blue in Fallujah. An Iraqi, whose vehicle was seized in Fallujah by unit blue, would come to unit green, now operating in Fallujah, asking for his vehicle. Unit green would not know anything about this vehicle because unit blue took the vehicle to Tikrit. This particular situation occurred many times and it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to locate these vehicles and return them to their proper owners.

Another situation that made returning vehicles difficult was that some units used vehicles for base camp operations. During these operations, vehicles would get damaged and the Iraqis had to file a claim to have their vehicles fixed. These claims were rarely approved due to lack of accountability on the U.S. forces. Units would insist that the damaged condition of the vehicle was the condition in which the vehicle was seized.

Training on properly using Department of the Army Form 4137, Evidence/Property Custody Document, and enforcing its use would have made the process of finding seized vehicles easier. Using this form would have also enforced accountability for using seized vehicles as well.

The 2/3 ACR built on the successful GST model developed by 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division during their period of responsibility for the city of Fallujah. The GST identified important political influences, developed relationships with important figures, and exploited these relationships to encourage a safe and secure environment for Iraqi citizens and coalition forces. The administration of Iraqi civil government is made easier if we empower individuals who share our goals of democratic city governments. There are Iraqi men and women who are willing to put their personal interests aside and serve their communities, but finding them in a city such as Fallujah is difficult and requires a GST dedicated to studying local tribal and civil politics. Because of a variety of cultural factors, Iraqis are prone to corruption and nepotism. If not closely monitored, they will embezzle aid money and misappropriate resources provided by the coalition. Commanders must carefully study Iraqi candidates before appointing them to vacant positions in the civil administration. A competently led GST can assist a commander in screening qualified candidates.



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